

HOTEL

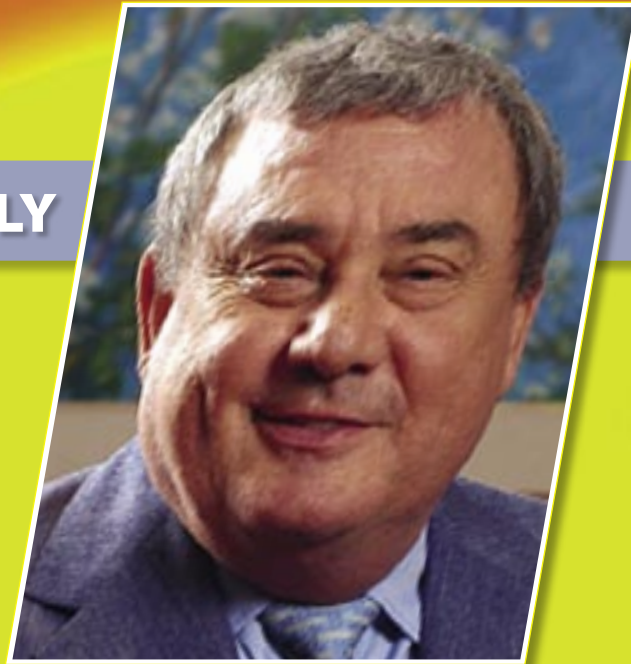
A S I A P A C I F I C

For hospitality professionals



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**TAKING ON
THE BIG BOYS**

HOTEL Asia Pacific

ASIA RISING



Tightly focused

Andreas Stalder, Hyatt's VP of F&B for Asia Pacific, discusses his challenges

What factors present the greatest challenge in managing quality, 4- and 5-star wine programmes in Asia Pacific?

The main challenges lie in cost, selection and consistency of supply.

Import taxes are still very high in some Asian countries, like Thailand and Indonesia, which severely limit the availability of good, value-for-money, wines. Until recently, that was true of India as well, but the duties have now been eliminated there.

Selection is critical, as supply is not always steady. It's important to work with reliable suppliers when running volume wine programmes. A good supplier must not only maintain adequate stock levels, but also ensure the quality and freshness of the wine by having proper temperature- and humidity-controlled warehouses that prevent spoilage.

Stock rotation is often a real challenge as well, especially because one of Hyatt's standards is to offer a wide selection of vintage wines and Champagnes by the glass.

Also, keeping wine programmes and wine-maker events on the edge and unique is not an easy job. Again, it is important to remain focused. If customers perceive they are getting decent wines at good value, they will reward you with repeat business.

How does your wine programme for Asia Pacific reinforce Hyatt's brand strategy?

As both wine production and consumption grow worldwide and new wine labels reach the marketplace every day, the consumer is faced with broader wine lists and an incredible choice of great wines from all over the world.

On the other hand, having too many options can sometimes unnecessarily complicate the task of selecting a bottle of wine.

Having a focused wine programme based on tight concepts, with fewer but better wines on the list and an emphasis on boutique rather than commercial wineries, helps make it easier to manage and facilitates the tasks of both the consumer and the *sommelier*.

In which countries in Asia Pacific are your wine sales the greatest, and why? Are any of the lessons learned in these countries transferable to other markets where wine sales are not what you would like them to be? It is important to look at Asia and the Pacific separately. Australians and New Zealanders are raised consuming wine with meals on a daily basis.

In these countries, it is interesting to observe that wine

consumption has not only been increasing every year, but that wine consumers are increasingly seeking better-quality wines. Their palates are maturing.

In Asia, the leading countries for selling wines are, by far, Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan, because of the combination of affluent disposable income, lower wine-import duties and an increasing population of educated wine aficionados and collectors.

The most important lesson learned in these countries of savvy wine consumers is that you can no longer overcharge for a bottle of wine.

Gone are the days when you could mark-up prices by three or four times.

People understand their wines, and have a far more sophisticated frame of reference as to how much they ought to be paying for any given bottle in a restaurant. If you overcharge them, they will ask for a beer!

You must be prepared to reduce your percentage mark-up in favour of higher sales volume which, at the end of the day, means more dollars on the bottom line.

What wine trends do you see emerging in Asia Pacific?

New-World wines continue to gain market share, as they are now perceived as being better value. In Asia, New Zealand *sauvignon blanc* and Australian *shiraz* continue to be hot but, with wine drinkers becoming better educated, we can see an increasing demand for elegant *rieslings* from New Zealand, Alsace and Germany, and rich, complex *pinot noirs* from New Zealand.

I've also noticed an increasing presence of top-quality boutique wines from Argentina and from lesser-known Italian regions, such as Sicily and Sardinia.

How involved are you in planning the restaurants and bars for each new hotel?

I'm involved in the planning of all restaurants and bars for every new hotel, as well as all renovation projects. I normally provide the hotels with overall, conceptual guidelines for their wine lists but, since availability varies so much from country to country, I prefer to leave it to the F&B teams of each hotel to make the final selections.

I encourage the hotels to focus on the products, with a careful selection based on availability in their markets, while keeping their lists open to all wine suppliers/importers.

The selection of wines-by-the-glass will then take into consideration the relationship between the hotel and



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the wine suppliers. It will also undergo a special price negotiation, in order to ensure we offer the best possible value to our customers.

Do you become involved with restaurant, bar and banqueting wine training in any way, or do you leave it to each hotel to decide?

The hotels normally conduct their own wine-sales training themselves, as they best understand their markets and clients. Often, they make use of resources and/or experts made available by key suppliers, like Moët Chandon/LVMH.

Do you ever develop and coordinate Asia Pacific F&B wine promotions across all hotels in the group?

No, we have tried to do so in the past, but our markets are all very different with respect to distribution channels, availability, pricing and taxes, which makes it far too complicated.

Do you set minimum standards for wine preservation? With which

systems have you had the most success?

Yes, all open bottles must be dated and checked daily by the restaurant manager or *sommelier*. Bottles will remain open up to three or four days maximum, depending on the wine.

We normally use manual *VacuVin* pumps in our hotels, which are easy to use and do the job. In some hotels, we have started using more sophisticated systems such as *Le Verre de Vin* and the results have been very good.

We've been avoiding the wine dispensers that pump nitrogen into the bottle, because they are quite costly and the process prevents us from bringing the bottle to the table when serving.

What are your favourite wines?

Life is too short to drink lousy wines. □

• Fred Tibbitts is a global wine consultant to some of the world's leading chain hotels and restaurants. Email: fredbev@fredtibbitts.com